



WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH IN FLORIDA

*From The
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*



State Profile 2002

*Delivering on the Nation's promise:
Safety and health at work for all people through prevention.*

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH is the primary federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH is located in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NIOSH mission is to provide national and world leadership to prevent work-related illness, injury, disability, and death by gathering information, conducting scientific research, and translating the knowledge gained into products and services. As part of its mission, NIOSH supports programs in every state to improve the health and safety of workers. NIOSH has developed this document to highlight recent NIOSH programs important to workers and employers in Florida.

The Burden of Occupational Illness and Injury in Florida

- In Florida, there are approximately 7.2 million individuals employed in the workforce.¹
- In 2000, 329 workers died as a result of workplace injuries.²
- The construction industry had the highest number of fatalities, followed second by services, and third by transportation and public utilities.²
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate of fatal workplace injuries was 4.8 deaths per 100,000 workers—above the national average rate of 4.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.²
- In 2000, there were 288,200 nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in Florida.³

The Cost of Occupational Injury and Illness in Florida

In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, a total of \$2.3 billion was paid for workers' compensation claims by Florida private insurers and self-insured employers.⁴ This figure does not include compensation paid to workers employed by the federal government and also underestimates the total financial burden for private sector businesses, since only a fraction of health care costs and earnings lost through work injuries and illnesses is covered by workers' compensation. Chronic occupational illnesses like cancer are substantially under-reported in workers' compensation systems because work-relatedness is often difficult to establish.

How NIOSH Prevents Worker Injuries and Diseases in Florida

Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) and Technical Assistance

NIOSH evaluates workplace hazards and recommends solutions when requested by employers, workers, or state or federal agencies. Since 1993, NIOSH has responded to 187 requests for HHEs in Florida in a variety of industrial settings, including the following example:

Naples, Florida: Potential Exposures at Aircraft Parts Plant

In April 1999, NIOSH received a request by management for an HHE at a plant in Naples, Florida, where aircraft parts are serviced and tested. NIOSH was asked to determine if the headaches and eye irritation reported by employees were related to exposures to isocyanate-containing paints, polyurethane packing foam, and cleaning solvents used at the plant. NIOSH investigators concluded that all measured air concentrations of irritants were below applicable limits. However, employees' gloves were not maintained properly and some employees were using air-purifying respirators although a respiratory protection program had not been established. Recommendations to the employer included implementing a comprehensive personal protection program and reducing the pressure in the solvent spray gun to minimize over-spray. Recommendations to employees included reporting health problems and avoiding eating, drinking, or smoking in the workplace.

Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Investigations

NIOSH developed the FACE program to identify work situations with a high risk of fatality and to formulate and disseminate prevention strategies. Since 1995, there have been two FACE investigations in Florida.

Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program

The purpose of the NIOSH Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program is to determine factors that cause or contribute to fire fighter deaths suffered in the line of duty. NIOSH uses data from these investigations to generate fatality investigation reports and a database of case results that guides the development of prevention and intervention activities. Since 1997, there have been three fire fighter fatality investigations in Florida.

Building State Capacity

State-Based Surveillance

NIOSH funds the Adult Blood Lead Epidemiology and Surveillance Program (ABLES) in the Florida Department of Health. Through ABLES, the agency's staff track and respond to cases of excessive lead exposure in adults which can cause a variety of adverse health outcomes such as kidney or nervous system damage and potential infertility. In addition, NIOSH funds the Sentinel Event Notification System for Occupational Risk (SENSOR), through which the state's Health Department staff track and develop interventions for specific occupational diseases and injuries such as acute pesticide-related illness.

Sunshine Education and Research Center (ERC) at the University of South Florida

The Sunshine ERC, one of 16 NIOSH ERCs nationwide, is located in the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health. The ERC provides academic training in industrial hygiene, occupational medicine, occupational health nursing, and hazardous substance management. In addition, continuing education is

provided to practicing professionals, a regional outreach program is conducted, and a research program was established to support new investigators. In fiscal year 2001, 70 students were enrolled and 21 were graduated. Forty-six continuing education courses were provided to 1,045 practicing professionals.

University of Miami

NIOSH currently funds a training program in Ergonomics and Safety at the University of Miami to prepare engineers and occupational health and safety specialists to meet the changing demands of industry, government, and service organizations. In fiscal year 2001, seven students were enrolled in the program.

Extramural Programs Funded by NIOSH

The following are examples of recent research contracts, research grants, training grants, or cooperative agreements funded by NIOSH in the state of Florida.

Comfort and Indoor Air Quality of Non-Industrial Buildings

Typical building ventilation systems, designed to maintain comfort while controlling carbon dioxide concentrations and odors, often do not control indoor contaminants emitted from furnishings and building materials. Elevated concentrations of various indoor contaminants may be a cause of building-related health complaints and symptoms, a significant occupational health problem. With support from NIOSH, researchers at the University of Miami are studying how to improve ventilation systems in order to create healthier indoor work environments.

Florida Fire Fighter Cancer Incidence and Mortality

NIOSH currently funds a study by researchers at the University of Miami to determine whether Florida fire fighters have excess risk for cancer, compared to the general Florida population. Over 42,000 records from the Florida Fire Marshal's Office, covering 26 years, will be linked with the Florida Cancer Data System, Florida Motor Vehicles, Pension Records, and Vital Statistics databases.

Heat Stress Assessment

Heat stress in the workplace can cause death or serious harm. The existing heat exposure assessment method, developed in the early 1970s, provides a sensitive measure for chronic, steady exposures to heat stress of workers in light clothing. Researchers at the University of South Florida will improve the method to accurately assess currently common short-term occupational exposures of workers in heavy protective clothing.

Additional information regarding NIOSH services and activities can be accessed through the NIOSH home page at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> or by calling the NIOSH 800-number at 1-800-356-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).

¹U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2000.

²DOL, BLS in cooperation with state and federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999-2000.

³DOL, BLS in cooperation with participating state agencies, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, 2000.

⁴National Academy of Social Insurance, *Workers' Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2000 New Estimates*, May 2002.

